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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000066

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: PDAS RAISES HUMAN RIGHTS WITH DEFMIN, CHIEF

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., John M. Ordway. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During meetings with Defense Minister Bhandari and Chief of the Army Staff Gurung, PDAS Moon encouraged the Nepal Army to deal with conflict-era human rights abuses openly and transparently. Until that time, U.S.-Nepal military cooperation will remain "limited." The DefMin sharply criticized the Maoists for maintaining a "separate army" and called for the "rehabilitation" of combatants into society. General Gurung said the Army will implement whatever integration and rehabilitation plan the political leaders approve. END SUMMARY.

#### Defense Minister's Hard Line on Maoists, Human Rights

¶2. (C) In a January 18 meeting, DefMin Bidhya Bhandari told PDAS Patrick Moon that the continued existence of a "Maoist army" is Nepal's main problem. "How can a party claim to respect the democratic process, while maintaining an army of its own?" Bhandari asked rhetorically. The Maoist combatants must be "rehabilitated," the DefMin added. (Note: Bhandari specifically avoided any reference to the "integration" of Maoist combatants into the Nepal security forces, as agreed in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. End note.) PDAS Moon agreed that the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants was a "major challenge" that requires flexibility by all parties. He noted that the discharge of the disqualified Maoist combatants represented a positive step in Nepal's peace process.

¶3. (C) On human rights, PDAS Moon urged the DefMin to investigate allegations of past Nepal Army abuses publicly and transparently. He frankly cautioned the DefMin that future military engagement will be "limited" until the Nepal Army deals with its human rights allegations openly and transparently; once it does so, the United States stands ready to deepen our military cooperation. PDAS Moon noted that the United States has a long history of friendship with the Nepal Army, and expressed thanks to the DefMin for Nepal's important contributions to UN peacekeeping missions.

¶4. (C) In response, the DefMin said she "respected" PDAS Moon's suggestion on human rights, but noted that during "transitional periods" many false allegations are made, particularly by the media. She urged the international community to hold the Maoists to the same human rights standards. The DefMin stressed that the Nepal Army "fully

believes in international human rights norms and standards," and would always remain "non-political and professional." She agreed that the Truth and Reconciliation and Disappearances Commissions could be useful and said the Army would cooperate with these institutions when formed.

#### Army Will Follow Political Decisions, COAS Says

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¶5. (C) In a separate December 19 courtesy call, Chief of the Army Staff Chhatra Man Singh Gurung told PDAS Moon that the Nepal Army remained committed to peace, stability, democracy, and human rights. Gurung noted that he trained at the U.S. Command and General Staff College, so understands the importance the United States attaches to democratic values. Because of Nepal's active participation in UN peacekeeping missions (4,400 troops in 13 missions) and extensive international training (principally in the U.S., U.K., and India), the Nepal Army is not "narrow-minded;" it is a well-trained, professional army committed to civilian supremacy. Gurung repeated the commitment he made to PACOM Commander Willard that the Nepal Army, despite its limitations, stood ready to support U.S. "global interests," including international peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and disaster operations.

¶6. (C) PDAS Moon thanked Gurung for the Nepal Army's important contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, including its role in the Haiti relief operations (Nepal has 1,100 troops serving in MINUSTAH). The integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants and the "democratization"

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of the military will be major challenges for the Army. PDAS Moon urged the Army to "be flexible," "demonstrate leadership," and "do what's best for the Nepali people," noting the positive role the U.S. military played in integrating American society. On human rights, PDAS Moon urged the Nepal Army to address allegations openly and transparently. Gurung thanked PDAS Moon for his support. According to Gurung, the Nepal Army is "not a major player" in the present context. The Army supports the process and will follow the "political decisions" of Nepali leaders.

#### Comment

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¶7. (C) DefMin Bhandari has emerged as one of the hardline opponents of the Maoists. Not a strong political force herself -- she occupies the position only because of her deceased husband, UML leader Madan Bhandari -- analysts question whose interests she represents: party ally K.P. Oli, conservative Indian interests, or anti-Maoist army officers? Bhandari's refusal to even mention the word "integration" in the meeting with PDAS Moon -- which nearly everyone, including the army, accepts will be necessary -- is disturbing and illustrates the complexity of forging an acceptable consensus on the integration and rehabilitation of Maoists combatants.

ORDWAY